

Federal Cabinet and Provincial Issues in Pakistan: A Study of the Punjab, 1947-1955

Naumana Kiran,

Department of History and Pakistan Studies,

University of the Punjab, Lahore. Pakistan

naumana.kiran@yahoo.com

naumana.history@pu.edu.pk

Under Indian Independence Act 1947, British Punjab was divided into East and West Punjab. Muslim-dominated West Punjab was inherited by Pakistan. The Muslim League's foundation was weak in the Province till 1944. It came into power in Punjab only in 1947 after creation of Pakistan. Its government in the Province showed pathetic picture from 1947 to 1955. Researcher wants to investigate Federal Cabinet's role in sorting out provincial problems including power struggle among provincial political leaders, conflict between the Governor and the Chief Minister, anti-Ahmediya movement, and conflict on introduction of One Unit.

Pakistan adopted Parliamentary and Cabinet system of Government in 1947 after independence. The institution of Cabinet worked efficiently, even in presence of strong Governor-Generals and took very important policy decisions on politics of the Punjab. This study seeks to investigate what role was played by the Cabinet to deal with the political issues emerged in the Punjab, when was Cabinet by-passed by the Prime Minister and the Governor General while issuing policy towards Punjab politics and on what issues Cabinet was directly involved in dealing with the Punjab's problems.

This paper has been produced mostly on the basis of primary source material including newly declassified Cabinet papers and the Prime Ministers' Papers. These Papers give a detailed insight account of the working of this important institution. The use of Cabinet files on various issues has enhanced the importance of this research paper and brings to light new aspects of various issues of the Punjab politics. It reveals the true value of the institution of the Cabinet in policy-making and decision-taking towards Punjab which has rarely been brought to light.

Key Words

Politics, Punjab, Federal Cabinet, Cabinet Files, powerful Centre.

Politics: Continuity and Change

Muslim League dominated Cabinets and the Punjab, 1947-54

a. Liaquat Ali Khan's Cabinet

Though the Muslim League, the founder political Party of the Pakistan, established its government both in the Centre and the Punjab in 1947 yet multiple conflicts emerged between the Federal Government and the Provincial Government. The dominance of Federal government in Punjab's provincial matters came on the scene in early years after creation of Pakistan in which the Federal Cabinet played its due role. The first conflict between the Centre and the Punjab emerged on the issue of refugees in 1948.

Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot, Chief Minister of Punjab, rejected the idea of establishing the Refugee Council due to its interference in the affairs of Provincial Government. All refugees' related decisions were taken by this Council and it was dominated by the federal government. Mamdot was also a member of it but he wanted to leave the Council due to the meddling of the Centre in its affairs.¹ The federal Cabinet also did not feel comfortable while dealing with Mamdot as he resisted federal policies including its control on the finances. On his insistence, the federal government had to issue Rs.50 million for refugee rehabilitation to Punjab Government.² Situation worsened when Mamdot refused to take Daultana and Malik Feroz Khan Noon³ in the Cabinet under the advice of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. In November 1948, Daultana occupied the seat of Punjab Provincial Muslim League's Presidentship and gradually eliminated Mamdot's support in the Muslim League Assembly Party.⁴

Liaquat Ali Khan imposed Governor Rule in the Punjab on January 24, 1949 during his visit to Lahore⁵ without getting approval of the Cabinet. He took the issue to the Cabinet on 3rd February 1949 and explained to the Ministers that he could not manage time to discuss the issue of imposition of section 92-A, under which Governor Rule could be imposed in a Province, with the subordinate role of the Cabinet. He explained that he had received reports from various federal Ministers including Malik Ghulam Mohammad, Minister of Finance, Zafrullah Khan, Minister of

¹Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot, Chief Minister of Punjab to Liaquat, 29 March 1948, S (1) PMS /48, PM Secretariat Branch, National Documentation Centre (NDC), Islamabad.

² Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule; The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999), 81.

³ Noon, Feroz Khan (1893-1970) studied at Aitcheson College and Bar at law from Oxford University, practiced for nine years in early career later entered politics. He served as CM of Punjab and East Bengal, Minister of Foreign Affairs and later PM of Pakistan.

⁴ Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan* Vol. 1 (Islamabad, NIHCR, , 95.

⁵ McGrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan's Democracy*, 59 for more details of political crisis of Punjab see 2(2) PMS/49 NDC, Islamabad.

Foreign Affairs and Mushtaq Ahmed Gurmani, Minister without portfolio that the best remedy for the problems in Punjab was the imposition of section 92-A.⁶ As he already had support of some Ministers, so no major question was raised by the other Ministers and his decision was endorsed by the Cabinet.

After imposition of Governor's Rule in the Punjab, Governor Francis Mudie wanted to control Punjab affairs by himself which practically went under Federal government's control. Liaquat's Cabinet and working committee of the Punjab Muslim League decided that advisers to Governor Mudie would be nominated by the Prime Minister. Mudie rejected the idea and insisted that the advisers 'are not imposed by the Centre...are my advisers and deal with me and not over my head'⁷ with the Central Ministers. The other reason of his resignation was that the Muslim League leadership of the Punjab started move against powers of the British Governor. Besides the Muslim League, a section of Lahore Press also started move against Francis Mudie.⁸ He resigned on 24 June 1949.⁹ His resignation was accepted by the Federal Cabinet and approved the name of Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar as first Muslim Governor of Punjab on 20th July 1949.¹⁰ He was inducted in the Federal Cabinet after few months as Minister of Communications¹¹, which left Chief Minister of Punjab without proper guidance. Cabinet appointed Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar as new Governor whose understanding of Punjab politics was minimum.¹² The situation of Punjab remained deteriorating.

The elections for provincial Legislature were held in the Punjab in 1951 on the basis of adult franchise. The Muslim League won the elections and formed government in the province under the leadership of Mian Mumtaz Daultana on 4th April 1951. Federal Cabinet was divided on the issue of land reforms in the Punjab. Liaquat Ali Khan wanted land reforms in the Punjab and Chief Minister Daultana was supporting him as it was provided in the election manifesto of the Muslim League. Anti-land reform group was led by Mushtaq Ahmad Khan Gurmani, Minister of Interior in the federal Cabinet and followed by Major Mubarak Ali and Syed Shah, Members Legislative Assembly from Punjab.¹³ Anti-land reform group was successful in its struggle to delay the decision on introduction of land reforms in the province. After assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, priorities of the both federal and provincial governments changed.

⁶ Cabinet Meeting (Mtg), 3 February 1949, 31/CF/49, National Documentation Centre (NDC), Islamabad.

⁷ Governor Francis Mudie to Liaquat Ali Khan, 12 May 1949, Mudie Papers cited in Safdar Mahmood, *The Rule of Muslim League, 1947-1954* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1986), 74.

⁸ Pakistan Times, 3 June 1949 and Nawa-i-Waqt, 21 June 1949.

⁹ Mcgrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan's Democracy*, 63

¹⁰ Cabinet Mtg., 20th July 1949, 31/CF/49, NDC, Islamabad.

¹¹ The Gazette of Pakistan Extraordinary (GPE), Notification, No. 1-C/CF/47, 15th August 1947, GOP, Cabinet Secretariat, Karachi. Ministries of the Federal Government, Official Record prepared by Cabinet Wing, National Documentation Centre (hereafter called NDC), Islamabad.

¹² Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter; A Political Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 261

¹³ Jalal, *State of Martial Rule*, 150.

b. Cabinet of Khawaja Nazimuddin, 1951-1953

The assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan further deteriorated the situation. Daultana could not develop cordial relations with the new Prime Minister, Khawaja Nazimuddin who was from Bengal. The Federal Cabinet had to face challenge of food shortage in Pakistan. The anti-land reform group artificially created problem of food shortage. Daultana, the Chief Minister of Punjab, giving tough time to the Federal Cabinet, was not following decisions of it. The Government was trying to seek loan from United States of America (USA) to buy wheat. The Cabinet was informed by Abdus Sattar Pirzada, Minister of Food and Agriculture, on 16 May 1953 that Daultana had been issuing statements like wheat was 'flooding'¹⁴ in Punjab markets, which had been creating troubles for the Federal Government. Nazmiuddin and other Ministers criticized such statements of Punjab's Chief Minister which in their view were weakening Pakistan's case of wheat loan from USA. Abdus Sattar Pirzada told the Cabinet that the instructions had been delivered to the Secretary of the Ministry of Food to explain the whole situation to the Chief Minister of Punjab and to ask him to refrain from issuing such statements.¹⁵

The next important problem which later was turned into the Punjabi-Bengali tussle was the Anti-Ahmediya¹⁶ Movement in the Punjab. Some historians have suggested that Nazimuddin's Cabinet was in state of indecision regarding the anti-Ahmediya Movement,¹⁷ which seems incorrect. Neither the Cabinet of Nazimuddin was a silent spectator nor in state of indecision. Many Cabinet meetings were held to discuss exclusively the question of dealing with the anti-Ahmediya movement.¹⁸ The *Khatam-e-Nabuwet Party*¹⁹ threatened to start Direct Action from February 23, 1953. Prime Minister told the Cabinet in its meeting held on February 21 that he had been in contact with the Chief Ministers and the Governors of Punjab and North West Frontier Province (presently called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to settle the issue. Prime Minister and the Minister of Industries Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar met the leadership of the *Khatam-e-Nabuwet Party* on February 20 to settle the issue peacefully. Nazimuddin suggested seeking *Ijma* (Consensus) of the *Ulema* from the Muslim countries to decide whether *Qadiyanis* were Muslims or non-Muslims.²⁰ It was a positive suggestion and if the *Ulema* of Pakistan accepted it, situation could be controlled in the earlier stage.

¹⁴ Cabinet Mtg, 16 May 1953, 134/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Ahmedis were a close-knit community who does not believe in the finality of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). They believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmed was prophet of Allah. This belief was regarded as blasphemous by the Muslims.

¹⁷ Hamid Yousuf, *Pakistan: A Study of Political Development* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 1999), 53; Talbot, *Pakistan A Modern History*, 140; Ziring, *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century*, 193 and many others

¹⁸ Cabinet Mtgs were held on the following dates: 21 February 1953, 25 February 1953, 26 February 1953, 27 February 1953, 10 March 1953, 20 March and so on.

¹⁹ The prominent leaders were Ihtishamul Haq, Abdul Hamid Badayuni, Abul Hasnat and Ataullah Shah Bokhari, Summary of the Movement, presented to the Cabinet by Ministry of Interior, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

²⁰ Cabinet Mtg, 21 February 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

Cabinet agreed in its meeting held on February 25 that the question of declaring *Ahmediya* as non-Muslims should be decided by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and not by the Government and that the issue should be presented in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. It further decided that Governors and Chief Ministers of Punjab, Sindh and North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Chief Secretaries and Inspector Generals of police must be extended invitation in the special meeting of the Cabinet, going to be held on February 26, 1953, in which the course of action regarding the tackling of the anti-*Ahmediya* movement was to be decided after further discussion.²¹

The Cabinet decided to issue a press communiqué and provincial governments were also informed officially about the Central government's course of action. It stated that *Ahmedis* or any other community could not be declared as minority against their will.²² Secondly, *Ahmedis* could not be removed from key posts only on the ground that they were *Ahmedis*. Nor could the demand for the removal of the Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan be entertained on the ground that he was an *Ahmedi*. Cabinet decided:

There was constitutional machinery provided for the removal of any Minister from office so long as he continued to enjoy the confidence of his colleagues and the elective representatives of the people in the Central Legislature, he could not be removed from his office. No one could be removed on the basis of religion.²³

The question of army action to deal with the said issue was also decided by the Cabinet. Ayesha Jalal says that after failing to get sanction from the federal government, on 6 March 1953 the area commander General Azam Khan had taken the decision to impose Martial Law in Lahore entirely on his own²⁴ The study of the Cabinet files has brought the fact to light that it was the Cabinet and not General Azam who decided that Direct Action of *Ahrars* must be dealt firmly and the army could also be used for the purpose. Further that the leaders of the movement must also be arrested.²⁵ The Cabinet had directed the Defence Secretary Iskandar Mirza on March 6, 1953 to issue instructions regarding the proclamation of Martial Law in Lahore. The following telegram was authorized to be issued at once to the C-in-C Pakistan Army:

The Punjab Government has intimated their inability to control situation in Lahore. General Azam has been directed to take over in Lahore and declare Martial Law...It is possible that Army may have to take over other towns and districts in the Punjab and you will prepare a complete plan to meet the situation.²⁶

²¹ Cabinet Mtg, 25 February 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 177.

²⁵ Cabinet Mtg, 27 February 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

²⁶ Cabinet decision, 6 March 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting are the part of the fact that the decision was taken by the Cabinet itself and not by General Azam.²⁷ As per decision of the Cabinet the people were informed through media that the anti-*Ahmediya* movement was basically political and was supported by a few *Ulema* only and the majority was against it. The following telegram was also issued to the District Magistrates by the Cabinet:

You must now use all your resources and use whatever force may be necessary to put down lawlessness wherever it takes place. Law and order must be fully restored and maintained. Where army help is required the fullest cooperation should be extended...²⁸

Cabinet also decided that authority in Punjab should be directed immediately to intercept the Punjab *Jatha* (group of people) and prevent them from entering the NWFP and that instructions were issued to the Frontier government to prevent infiltration of the volunteers into the Tribal areas.²⁹ Evidently the Federal Cabinet was not a silent spectator but was busy in sorting out the problems. The allegation of not taking timely action against the anti-*Ahmediya* Movement is based on misinterpretation and therefore the conclusion that Nazimuddin's dismissal was on this ground is not correct. It came to the surface later that the agitation was supported by the Punjab government who gave large subsidies to 'the Press from the Government's secret fund to promote the cause.'³⁰ Nazimuddin, with the approval of his Cabinet, persuaded Daultana to resign from the office of Chief Minister. Cabinet also approved the name of Malik Feroz Khan Noon as next Chief Minister of the Punjab.³¹ Khawaja Nazimuddin was also dismissed by the Governor General Ghulam Mohammad in April 1953 after settling the affairs in the Punjab.

c. Mohammad Ali Bogra's Cabinet, 1953-1954

Mohammad Ali Bogra³² was appointed as Prime Minister by the Governor-General. During Bogra's regime, the balance of power shifted from the Cabinet to the Governor General, Malik Ghulam Mohammad, with the support of the Inner Cabinet³³ who controlled the affairs not only at Centre but also in the Punjab. The reason of this shift was strong provincial standing of the Governor-General whereas Prime Minister Bogra, who had recently been called back from USA, did not enjoy provincial moorings.³⁴ The new Chief Minister of the Punjab, Malik Feroz Khan Noon

²⁷ Cabinet decision, 10 March 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Punjab Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, 1954), 81.

³¹ He was serving as Chief Minister of East Bengal at that time Malik Feroz Khan Noon, *From Memory*, (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1966)

³² Bogra, Mohammad Ali (1909-1963), graduated from Presidency College Calcutta in 1930, belonged to a nawab family, his father Nawab Ali Chaudhary was first Minister in East Bengal's Cabinet. He was active in local politics, ambassador of Pakistan in USA, served as Prime Minister from 1953 to 1955 and Foreign Minister in Ayub's Cabinet.

³³ Syed Noor Ahmad, *Politics in the Punjab: From Martial Law to Martial Law* (Lahore: Vangaurd, 1985), 323.

³⁴ Zarina Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-58: An Historical Review* (Islamabad: NIHCR, 1992), 82.

did not have membership of the provincial legislature, but continued as Chief Minister only with the support of the Federal Government.

The Cabinet of Mohammad Ali Bogra followed Punjab policy of the previous government on issue of Ahmediya movement. The Cabinet of Bogra decided on 20th May 1953 that Prime Minister must tell the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in the up-coming budget session that Ahmediya movement was purely a political movement and the actions taken by the Central Government had the approval and confidence of the provincial governments.³⁵ During Mohammad Ali Bogra's premiership, Punjab's government did not give as tough time to Central government as it gave in previous regimes but strong rift continued between Feroz Khan Noon (Chief Minister) and pro-Daultana faction of the Muslim League. Daultana was active only behind the scene as he had been disqualified to take part in politics for failure to maintain law and order during his tenure of office.³⁶ Federal Cabinet discussed the issue and Cabinet colleagues raised different views. One minister said that formation of groups inside the party must be discouraged. It was also suggested that Central government must not interfere on the issue of reformation of Punjab's provincial Cabinet.³⁷ Chief Minister must settle the issue by himself. It was brought to the notice of the Cabinet that considerable evidence had been produced in front of Court of Inquiry against Mr. Daultana during Lahore disturbances. Cabinet decided that the issue must be settled by the Court and Centre must not interfere.³⁸ On the whole, Governor General, not the Cabinet, was involved in provincial matters.

Non-Party Cabinet: Cabinet of All Talents, 1954-1955

The first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was dismissed on 24th October 1954 as it tried to reduce the powers of the Governor-General while passing a bill. In response to this attempt of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, it was dismissed by the Governor-General. In absence of any Legislature, Governor General appointed a Cabinet who was named as Cabinet of All Talents. It was nominee of the Governor-General and answerable to him only, so it served only as a subordinate institution to the Governor-General. He remained more active in dealing with Punjab affairs than the Cabinet of Mohammad Ali Bogra. The Cabinet started work on introduction of One Unit in West Pakistan with greater alacrity. Malik Feroz Khan Noon, who was initially in favour of One Unit Scheme of the Cabinet of All Talents, started using delaying tactics to materialize the plan in the Punjab. Besides it, Malik Feroz Khan Noon was not supporting seven Ministers of the second Constituent Assembly of Pakistan from Punjab, who were nominated by the Governor

³⁵ Cabinet Mtg, 20 May 1953, 50/CF/53, NDC, Islamabad.

³⁶ Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-58: An Historical Review*, 82.

³⁷ Meeting 30 December 1953, File No. 326/CF/53, CP, NDC.

³⁸ Meeting 30 December 1953, File No. 326/CF/53, CP, NDC.

General.³⁹ Governor General was not happy with these moves of Noon so made the way to dismiss Noon.

Prime Minister in company of Finance minister and Interior Minister visited Punjab, most probably under the orders of the Governor General and found that the government had lost support of the majority. Four members of the Punjab's Cabinet had resigned. Noon's ministry was dismissed by Governor Gurmani under Governor General's order without even informing the Cabinet of Talent. In the words of K.K. Aziz, "... Mr. Mohammad Ali's mouth was shut up and his Cabinet did not know what to do?"⁴⁰ Cabinet was informed only later that the division in the Cabinet had made everyday business a mess and many of the ministers were using government officers for political purposes.⁴¹ Chief Minister of Punjab Malik Feroz Khan Noon and Mushtaq Ahmed Gurmani who was appointed as Governor on 25th November 1954, as was told to the Cabinet,⁴² had rift against each other that's why Noon Ministry was dismissed. Cabinet was further informed by the interior minister Iskander Mirza that Noon's Government wanted to allot land of Rs. thirty two crore to military generals, judges, Cabinet ministers and to various members of legislature which was illegal, so his ministry was dismissed.⁴³

It seems, on the basis of available facts that the actual reason of dismissal of Noon's government was elections of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan scheduled to be held in September 1955 in which Governor General wanted that the people of his choice must be elected from Punjab including six Federal Ministers. Malik Feroz Khan Noon was not ready to be dictated so his government's dismissal was its fate. The second important reason was disagreement on the introduction of One Unit in the West Pakistan between Centre and his government. Governor Gurmani, with the approval of Governor General appointed Daultana's nominee, Abdul Hamid Dasti, as the new Chief Minister. Noon departed not only the government but also the Muslim League and formed an independent group. Later he played important role in formation of the Republican Party.⁴⁴ Abdul Hamid Dasti obliged the Centre by having a majority of its nominees elected to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan including six Ministers of the Federal Cabinet.⁴⁵ He further materialized the Plan of One Unit in the Punjab and proposal was approved by the Legislature.

³⁹ Inamur Rehman, *Public Opinion and Political Development in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78-79.

⁴⁰ K.K. Aziz, *Party Politics in Pakistan 1947-1958* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 1976.), 28

⁴¹ Summary Presented to the Cabinet in its meeting held on 21st May 1955, Case NO. 356/51/55 File No. 111/CF/55, CP, NDC.

⁴² Cabinet Mtg, 25 November, 1954, 252/CF/51, NDC, Islamabad.

⁴³ Cabinet Mtg, 25 May 1955, 111/CF/55, NDC, Islamabad.

⁴⁴ Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 210

⁴⁵ Rehman, *Public Opinion and Political Development* 177.

Conclusion

The difference in the style of dealing with Punjab's affairs and politics can be seen during the regimes of four Prime Ministers from 1947 to 1955. During Liaquat Ali Khan's premiership (1947-1951), Cabinet was mostly taken into confidence and if decision was taken by the Prime Minister at the spot, his attitude was later on apologetic, while presenting the issue in the Cabinet. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was repentant while presenting the case of dismissal of Mamdot's ministry in the Cabinet. The Cabinet of Nazmiuddin (1951-1953) was more active in decision-making regarding Punjab than the Prime Minister only. Whereas two tenures of Mohammad Ali Bogra, first from 1953 to 1954 and the second from 1954 to 1955, observed a new trend. Governor General Malik Ghulam Mohammad was more involved in Punjab affairs than the Cabinet. He did not even inform the Prime Minister or his Cabinet about the decision of dismissal of Punjab's government. The mockery of the situation was that Interior Minister Iskandar Mirza (who was in direct connection with Governor General) informed the Cabinet about reason for dismissal of Punjab's government. West Pakistan provinces were merged into One Unit on 30th September 1955 and separate status of the province of Punjab was over, so the next Cabinets dealt with the government of West Pakistan not with the Punjab. The study of relations between Federal Cabinet and the Punjab emphasizes on some important realities. It was, in fact, from 1947 to 1955 when some trends regarding nature of relationship between the Centre and the provincial governments especially Punjab were set; Cabinet started taking interest in provincial matters more than it must take, even Cabinets and Governors of the provinces were dismissed off and on, on the basis of one or the other reason. Secondly, the option of use of military by the Cabinet to settle provincial issues also started in this period. Lastly, the trend of trusting inner Cabinet to solve provincials issue more than full Cabinets was initiated during the later years of the period under study. The Cabinet or Governor-General's involvement in provincial politics of the Punjab was not positive development in the newly independent state. The provincial governments must be given fair chance to deal with the matters and to present solutions to the issues.